

July 28, 2006

The Honorable Ron Sims
King County Executive
701 Fifth Avenue, Suite 3210
Seattle, WA 98104

Dear Executive Sims:

On behalf of the members of the Healthy Families and Communities Task Force (HFC), we are pleased to transmit to you our final report, titled “Investing in our Families and Communities: Recommendations for Stabilizing the King County Regional Human Services System.”

When you convened the HFC in July 2005, you charged us with implementing the recommendations of the previous citizen committee, the Task Force on Regional Human Services. Specifically, you asked us to perform the following tasks:

- Identify the amount of regional human services financing needed for the future;
- Identify a new revenue source dedicated to human services, including the requirements to be included in a future ballot measure;
- Define the charge, membership and appointment process for a regional human services board to be responsible for administering the new revenues from the ballot measure;
- Develop a public education campaign plan that demonstrates the importance of human services to the health and safety of our communities.

We hope you will find, as you read our report, that we have addressed each of these issues and have developed a strategic plan for accomplishing the goal of stabilizing human services for the future.

As you know, our task force was well into its work when the Metropolitan King County Council moved to place a veterans and human services ballot measure before the voters. The Veterans and Human Services Levy sought voter approval to increase property taxes by five cents per \$1,000 of assessed value to raise an estimated \$13.3 million per year for six years. Half of the revenue to be raised by the levy was dedicated to services for veterans, military personnel and their families and the other half to fund regional health and human services for others in need. In November 2005, the voters overwhelmingly approved the levy, a very positive step toward achieving much-needed funding to help low-income individuals and families across the county.

Our members reviewed and analyzed the results of the 2005 election and the amount of funding to be generated by the new levy. While we are very grateful to the voters for their support and approval, we found that the amount to be raised would not be sufficient to address the un-met need for human services. Therefore, as a body we decided to continue our work, with a focus on identifying longer-term solutions.

The HFC was very deliberate in determining the funding gap for regional human services, as well as outlining the next steps to securing stability for the human service system. Although we knew this would be a challenging set of tasks, we were committed to developing a strategy to ensure the continuation and expansion of the county's vital services and programs for the benefit of our most needy and vulnerable residents.

Though many of us understood that the need for basic health and human services was expanding in our community, we were alarmed to learn that the funding gap for human services far exceeded our estimates. At the time of the Veteran and Human Services Levy, some members of the human services community estimated the gap in human services funding to be approximately \$40 million. We were dismayed to find that this figure was far too low. With the assistance of the King County Office of Management and Budget, we determined that the funding gap for health and human services in our region is an estimated \$83.1 million. It is important to note that this total only reflects the un-met need for those regional services provided and primarily funded by the county and its regional partners; it does not reflect the shortfalls in services that are primarily funded by federal and state governments, such as mental health, substance abuse and child welfare, for example.

Faced with this identified regional funding shortfall, the HFC developed a long-term plan that, if implemented, will secure many of the needs of our families and communities well into the future.

Our strategy begins with using new fund sources as a means of reducing the amount of un-met need, beginning with the Veterans and Human Services Levy proceeds. By applying the entire \$6.65 million proceeds for regional human services and \$1 million from the veterans' half of the proceeds, we reduce the funding gap by \$7.65 million. Applying some of the funds appropriated by the Washington State Legislature to implement 2-1-1 locally also helps to reduce the gap and addresses the need for greater regional information and service referral capabilities.

Next, we propose pursuing a 0.1 percent sales tax increase allowable under RCW 82.14.460 to fund mental health and substance abuse services for homeless people and high-risk youth and adults in the criminal justice system, and to provide other supportive services for low-income residents. Finally, our recommendations call for one or more future ballot measures to close the remaining human services funding gap over a period of time.

The earlier Task Force on Regional Human Services found, and the HFC concurs, that the regional human services system in King County is fragmented and greatly in need of coordinated improvements. The Task Force recommended that the HFC define the charge, membership and appointment process for a regional human services board that would reduce duplication of efforts, improve efficiencies and maximize access to human services.

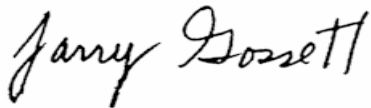
Since the Veterans and Human Services Levy created a regional citizen advisory board to oversee the levy funds dedicated to human services, the HFC had reservations about creating yet another board for regional human services. Both the King County Council and the Regional Policy Committee had also expressed concerns with regard to the HFC creating another board that would bifurcate the regional human services system. In order to promote system efficiencies and improve access to services, the HFC believes we must strive to coordinate regional efforts. Our recommendation to expand the role, responsibilities and membership of the levy's regional human services board to include oversight of new revenue and other system improvements supports a combined and collaborative effort to address the community's human services needs.

The HFC also agrees with the original task force's finding that there is a lack of understanding among our residents as to what human services are or how they benefit the lives of those who receive services, as well as the livability of our communities as a whole. Further, there is a lack of knowledge regarding the needs of our poorest populations and the extent to which we are currently unable to meet those residents' needs. We must communicate the challenges that daily face many of our families and individuals as they struggle to meet survival needs such as affordable housing, food and health care. It is clear that we must also find a way to communicate, at the most basic level, that human services improve the quality of life for all our citizens. This is a county-wide responsibility and we must involve our regional and local governments, non-profits, business, United Way, faith-based organizations and the community at-large.

That is why the HFC urges you, the members of the King County Council and our regional partners to consider our recommendations and take immediate action toward implementing our proposals. We must create funding stability and a more efficient regional human services system, focusing on the common goal of improving the availability and delivery of services to our residents who are most in need.

We recognize the commitment you have shown toward finding a long-term solution to regional human services funding by convening the HFC and the prior Task Force on Regional Human Services. We commend your leadership and pledge to you our support as you move forward in the effort to achieve stability for our critical community health and human services systems for the future.

Respectfully,



King County Councilmember Larry Gossett
Co-Chair



Mayor Kathy Keolker, City of Renton
Co-Chair

Enclosure

cc: Metropolitan King County Council
Regional Policy Committee
Healthy Families and Communities Task Force Members